

CHEAP TRACTS, No. 1.

THE  
GREAT IMPORTANCE

OF

# Parental Instruction;

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

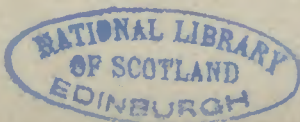
*Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it.*—Proverbs xxii. 6.



DUNFERMLINE :

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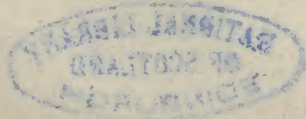
## PARENTAL INSTRUCTION.

III

*Train up a child in the way he should go  
and when he is old he will not depart  
from it.*

PROVERB

THAT the religious education of his children is a concern of the utmost importance, no conscientious parent is disposed to deny. He admits the claim of the infant mind to tender and careful cultivation. He considers himself as standing in a place of high responsibility, and to "train up his child in the way he should go," he feels it to be an imperious duty, which he cannot neglect without incurring a great degree of guilt. Happy would it be for the rising generation, happy for parents themselves, and for the world at large, if these feelings were more generally acknowledged and obeyed. It is, however, too common to limit the provision we make for our children to their wants and conveniences of the *present* life. Chiefly concerned about "what they shall eat, or what they shall drink, and wherewithal they shall be clothed," we suffer the demands of the body to drown the cries of the immortal mind for its congenial nourishment.



ishment. Sensible objects attract and absorb our attention, while the invisible, though infinitely nobler part, is denied its just regard. A conduct certainly very preposterous. We reverse the order of things. We make that a *primary* which ought to be a *secondary* consideration, and teach our children, by our own example, to contradict that excellent rule of christianity, "Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness."

The evil of neglecting the reasonable demands of *external* nature, strikes us with peculiar force. We view it with dread; and we labour with timely care to prevent it. This is well; and this we ought to do, without leaving the other undone. Great, incalculably great, is the evil to be dreaded for our children from the neglect of their *religious* instruction. It is an evil which may be *immediately* observed, which spreads *increasingly* through life, and which involves *eternal consequences*.

The *immediate* evil resulting from a neglect of religious instruction is observable, not only in the child's extreme ignorance of whatever is morally good, but in the pernicious habits which he inevitably contracts. That the human mind, as soon as it begins to act, discovers a bias to evil, experience, I think, will not allow us to

dispute. Hence that impatient, peevish, contradictory, temper, so common to very young children, especially after indulgence; and hence their readier and easier imitation of a *bad*, than of a *good* example. Now, if no wholesome restraint is imposed, if this evil bias is not counteracted, what are we to expect? What, but all that folly, all that deceit, all that disobedience, and all those other vicious propensities, which, alas, we have too frequent reason to lament in the disposition and behaviour of our youth. The mind cannot remain wholly inactive. It has received a productive energy from its Creator, and unless the seeds of virtue are early sown in its soil, that energy will be spent on the weeds and poisonous fruits of vice. Left without moral cultivation it resembles the field of the sluggard, and the vineyard of the man void of understanding. The passenger remarks that "it is all grown over with thorns, and nettles have covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereon is broken down." And what parent so insensible as not to feel those thorns and nettles in the untoward disposition of his neglected child? It may be, he is indifferent about the culture of the tender mind; but he will often be chagrined with the sad consequences of that indifference. He may not sufficiently feel the importance of re-

religious instruction; but the neglect of it will prove to him a fruitful source of inquietude and pain. The thorns and thistles will not gall him the less that he is unwilling to acknowledge them the growth of his own negligence. And it cannot be denied that herein the parent is justly punished. How wisely has God connected *duty* with *reward*, and *disobedience* with *punishment*! "Take this child, and nurse it for me," is the commission of Heaven to every parent;—obey, and you are rewarded with dutiful and tender returns on the part of your child;—disregard the heavenly voice, and you are punished with contempt of parental authority; for it will be found, in general, that the youth who never hears of his duty to his Creator, is deficient in filial reverence and obedience.

Abraham, the venerable father of the Jewish nation, has obtained the testimony of the Holy Ghost in favour of his paternal care. "I know my servant Abraham," says the Lord, "that he will command his children and his household after him, and they will keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgement." He tutored Isaac to the fear of the Lord, and the reward of this conscientious parent, in the obedience and meek submission of his pious son, is sufficiently acknowledged by every one who

reads his Bible. But is it possible, without very painful regret, to contrast with this the sad story of Eli and his wicked sons? It is said of these young men, that "they knew not the Lord." Their sin was so great that he sent a prophet to denounce his righteous judgement against the too indulgent parent and his family. Hear it, ye that connive at the depravity of your offspring, hear it, and tremble! "Thus saith the Lord, wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice, and mine offering and honourest thy sons above me? Behold the days come that I will cut off thine arm and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die, both of them!" Nor can we read, without similar emotions, the case of Adonijah, one of David's sons. "Him his father had not displeased at any time, in saying, why has thou done so?" A sufficient intimation of the parent's extreme indulgence. This remark, upon his domestic education seems to have been made by the sacred historian, as if to prepare us for the melancholy sequel. The young prince contracted a spirit of insubordination, embittered the last hour of his father's life by a rash rebellion, and brought himself and his adherents to speed destruction.

The neglect of early instruction, it has been farther observed, is an evil to the child which *spreads increasingly* through life. Thorns and thistles undisturbed will rapidly enlarge. See how the uncultivated field is overgrown with rank, pernicious, weeds!—how fast they multiply,—how thick they stand together, and intertwine their numerous arms! They usurp the whole surface; and should a single grain of useful seed chance to drop upon it, there is no vacant soil to receive it; or should it be permitted to shoot a green leaf into view, how feebly, how imperfectly does it rise, and how soon does it perish for want of vegetable food! Such is the condition of the neglected mind. The dawn of reason, which is the signal for commencing a rational education, has been suffered to pass away unimproved, and vice obtains an easy and early possession of the heart. At first, it breaks out in a few venial offences, and just discovers its presence. But it is an insidious foe. If not crushed on its first appearance, it gains increasingly upon the soul, and, shaping into innumerable varieties, seizes on all its powers. Vice is naturally despotic; it aspires to universal dominion; and where motives to virtue are never presented, it will most assuredly obtain it. Untaught in moral distinctions, the judgment will be involved in darkness,

and prove perverse in its decisions: unaccustomed to wholesome restraint, the desires will capriciously fix on the most improper objects; never directed to the sublimer beauties of religion, the affections will become grovelling and impure; while the will, a stranger to the power of godliness, grows obstinately disobedient, and is led away captive by the wild and unhal- lowed passions of a natural mind. Such is the sad, but too probable experience of those whose earliest years have been favoured with no religious tuition. Poor neglected rationals!—how I pity you!—my heart bleeds for you. I see you in the morning of your days, in all your gaiety, and I ask, what are you?—What but so many proofs of original depravity,—embryos of future outrages to your parents, to society, to yourselves;—the victims of moral corrup- tion, and the nurslings of hell!

What a dreadful prospect does this afford! It cannot surely be suggested to an affec- tionate parent without creating an alarm terminating in a determination to use every effort, under divine assistance, to reverse it. Without this, there is no rational ground to hope that the worst consequences shall not be realized. It is but just to fear that the neglected child will become a vicious youth; and the vicious youth, a hardy and ultimate-



ly impenitent veteran in the ways of wickedness. Those evil passions that broke out at first into little fits of fretfulness and rage, encouraged, perhaps, with a smile on that countenance that should have awed them into silence, strengthen into pride, self-conceit, contempt of authority, and an habitual propensity to criminal pursuits. That such is the general process is a fact, alas, too strikingly corroborated by the history of mankind. This maxim is written, as it were, in large capitals, as a running title on the pages of that history, THE UNINSTRUCTED MIND HAS A MELANCHOLY TENDENCY TO DEGENERATE. Here then we have a general law, by which to explain many appearances of the moral world. Upon this we may fairly reason. As in the material world, we uniformly expect the same results from the same combination of circumstances; so, in the affairs of mind, we naturally conclude that the same treatment will operate the same effects. Hence a wise and pious tuition in tender years is expected to ensure, for the rest of life, a continuance in wisdom and piety: while, on the other hand, it is proved, by daily experience, that "train up a child in the way he should *not* go, and when he is old, he will *certainly* be wicked." Yes, the first impressions are the most durable. The strongest propensities are formed

in childhood, and if they are bad, as they will undoubtedly be, where religious education is neglected, they harden into habits which are not easily overcome. For the truth of this, may I not appeal to an expression too commonly found in the mouths of adults in wickedness? "I am too old to learn; my habits are fixed, and cannot be changed." Such, indeed, is the confirming power of evil habits, that a prophet places the probability of reformation in a case of this kind, on the same footing with that of a controul over the uniform operations of nature; "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?—then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil."

If these, then, are general laws of mind, fairly deducible from daily observation, how great is the danger of neglecting early instruction. For let it be remembered, that the *neglect* of virtuous and godly tuition is a *positive training* to irreligion and vice. Her that is not *for* religion, is *against* her. There can be no neutrality here. Our Lord in the gospel describes only two ways; the one is broad, and leads to destruction; the other narrow, and leads to life. There is no intermediate path; and the youth who has not been led into the safe and narrow way, will, of necessity, be found in the broad way, running a dangerous and progressive course.

of folly. And how can it be otherwise? The native darkness of his mind, never penetrated with a single ray of religious instruction, becomes grosser and grosser. Errors multiply and rule the judgement. Having no previous principles to supplant, they gain an easy ascendancy. Every thing is now beheld through the medium of strong delusion. Truth, if it be offered, is rejected with impatience. It has no beauty, nor comeliness, in it to attract a mind of this description. In his childhood, it had not gained his reverence; and as he grows up, he learns to persecute it with ridicule and contempt. How often in the case of a neglected and deluded youth, has a pious friend been forced to close the kindest remonstrances with this despairing exclamation, "Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell the truth?"

Nor is the evil confined to sentiment. The fountain is impure, and the streams which it sends forth cannot be wholesome. This corruption of principle produces all the sad variety of moral turpitude. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" It is excellently advised by Solomon, "keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." This is the advice of sage experience; for the heart is that important department which commands the whole man.

Our Lord traces from the natural heart all that is morally bad. "Out of the heart," he says, "proceed evil thoughts," and from these he derives a black catalogue of crimes, which, in truest sense of the word, "defile the man." Those evil thoughts accustomed to work in the uncultivated mind, as in their native region, exhibit their respective efficiencies in the conversation and conduct. They are restless traitors, which the infatuated youth carries and fosters in his bosom, till they awaken the baneful passions which impel him to every act of indiscretion and criminality. Behold that town without its fortifications. It is not merely *exposed* to the ravages of an enemy; but it invites him to take possession, and offers itself an easy prey to riot, and to plunder, and to slavery! Such is an exact emblem of the heart which is left unguarded by religious principle. A temptation attacks, and no preparation is made for defence. There is no grace to resist, and to say, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Fatal compliance is therefore unavoidable; and the first temptation, like the devil in the parable, brings with it seven others more dreadful than itself, but still more welcome, and still more successful. The passions which now become the tyrants of the soul, must be gratified. God and his laws are

unknown, or despised. Warning comes too late. The tears of mortified, disappointed parents, are ridiculed. Character, health, fortune, friends, are sacrificed;—to what, to pleasure, shall I say? Nay, but to infamy, disease, remorse, and wretchedness! Melancholy issue!

But this is not all. The subject rises infinitely higher in its importance, when we consider, that the neglect of religious instruction in early youth is an evil which often involves *eternal* consequences. These consequences are of the most dreadful nature, and calculated to excite in the mind of a thinking parent the most terrific ideas. The evil of this neglect, great as it is in the present life, does not terminate with it; it reaches into another world: and oh, what an awful thought, there it cannot be remedied! While the soul continues in union with the body, the case, however bad, must not be thought desperate. The careless parent may be roused to a sense of his criminal neglect. He may be brought to weep over his abused offspring, and his acute sensations of self-reproach and paternal commiseration may force tears from his eyes, that, through the blessing of God, may soften their hearts, and prove the means of their recovery: But when the immortal spirit is summoned from the clay tenement, to take its trial

before the Judge of all, it is past time to correct the error. "As the tree falls, so must it lie." And if the surviving parent is now made conscious of having withheld from that soul means of spiritual life, how shocking must the reflection be! It is *now* only, but too late, that he feels the weighty importance of that solemn charge given by the Lord to the prophet, as if it had been actually addressed to himself; "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, thou shalt surely die, and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked of his way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand." What an awful accountability is here expressed! A parent who appropriates such a charge as this, and whose conscience accuses him of having neglected, till it is too late, to fulfil it, is no enviable case. I believe that it is often the regret of the best of men, when their children are taken from them, that their religious instruction has been so deficient. Upon these occasions, a new solicitude about the fate of their offspring is excited. However great their concern, however strong their exertions when opportunities

existed, they reckon them all by far too little, in comparison of what they *now* feel were due on their part. Sometimes, indeed, the departure of a child is such as to leave a pleasing hope in the mind of a pious parent; and this hope more than compensates for his laborious instrumentality in training the disembodied soul for glory. A parent naturally shares in the happiness of his child. He cannot be indifferent to any thing that concerns him. He follows him while still in the body, through all the probable events of his future life, and anticipates the various turns of Providence which may yet distinguish him. But his anticipations, if he has any religious feeling, are not confined to the shifting scenes of the present state. He has many an anxious thought about the unalterable condition of the soul in another world. And if, when his young charge is taken from him, he has a well-grounded hope that the soul, once the burden of his frequent prayers, and the object of his pious instruction, is *now* in possession of eternal bliss, what consolation is his under the loss of his society! What joy in reflecting on the glory to which he is exalted! What ingratitude for the part committed to him of pointing out the way that led to the blessed issue!

But contemplate an opposite case,—that of a parent, who, bereaved of his child, is tortured with the recollection of duties omitted, or carelessly performed,—duties to which that child, now no longer his, had a claim the most natural, and the most solemn that can possibly be conceived. The omission is not now to be made up. The opportunity of offering some preparatory instruction to the departing soul is lost for ever. “Alas, and must my own offspring perish for lack of that knowledge which it was my part to communicate? Intolerable thought! Perhaps even now, that much neglected soul is bearing a just testimony before the bar of God against my unnatural indifference to her immortal interests. O cruel neglect!—O unhappy father! Have I brought into existence a human being, only for misery, and that eternal? Would to God I had never been, or that—but what do I say? Would to God I had done my duty! He gave me opportunities of saving him, and I neglected them. His intended blessings are, by my abuse, converted into curses. What aggravated guilt! That lifeless corpse before me, now about to mingle with the sordid dust, but lately occupied my whole concern. Upon it I heaped my favours, regardless of the inhabitant within. That body, while it lived,



took all the attention, engulfed all the anxieties of my mind; and the soul that cannot die was sacrificed to the indulgences of this temporary frame. And now it mocks my unavailing solicitude; it reproaches me for a fondness so sinfully misplaced. With a shrewdness which the world approved, I had provided for the temporal interests of my child. Methought I saw into his career in life, and had wisely prepared for all its vicissitudes. Alas, how infatuate! oh, that I had employed half this ill-directed care to the religious instruction of the precious, precious soul! Then, with the blessing of God, my child would have been happily prepared for his final change. Then, at least, should I have delivered my own soul, nor felt, as I now do, the unutterable anguish of a self-condemning conscience."

These, and more awful still than these, have, no doubt been the reflections of many parents, who, after having neglected the religious instruction of their children, have not, till too late, been sensible of the guilt they have thus contracted.

I ask any father, or any mother, of religious feeling, whether the above reflections are represented in language too impassioned for the case supposed. Is it not more than probable that a parent whose

conscience is thus awakened, must experience a torture of mind which his tongue cannot express,—a terror of soul, beyond the colouring of language to depict?—Merciful God, I beseech thee, let no such case ever occur within my knowledge!—Oh, let not the hand that now writes, ever tremble under the pressure of convictions so awful; nor let the eye that now reads ever weep tears of remorse so bitter!

*It ought, indeed, to be observed, that it is by no means consistent with the right notions of the divine government, to suppose that the eternal state of a human soul is left to the mercy of any creature or creatures, whatever. No, the complexion of eternal things is not so capriciously determined. This momentous article, like all other of God's ways, is settled by a justice, combined with a wisdom and a goodness, each of them perfect, and altogether divine. But the dispensations of grace are regulated in a way generally analogous to the operations of nature. Appropriate means are employed in both, without the application of which, the desirable end cannot legitimately be expected. And surely no means of conveying moral and religious instruction to the young mind can be more natural than those of parental exertion. A child is a precious trust, which God first and*

most emphatically deposits in the hands of the parent. The young mind is the soil intended for cultivation, and the parent the husbandman, under God, to labour upon it. As therefore "the sluggard, who will not plow by reason of the cold," so the parent, who will not afford to his child the religious instruction which he ought to communicate, endangers the immortal interests of his offspring, and prepares for himself nothing but disappointment, vexation, and remorse.

### NOTE.

I knew a parent who had sadly neglected the religious and moral instruction of his children, and who was in consequence exposed to many grievous mortifications. At no period of my life do I remember having been more shocked, than at a scene between him and his son, which I happened to witness. The father had gently reprov'd the young man for some boastful expressions he had uttered, when he was presently under the pitiable necessity of withdrawing from his infuriate son, who poured upon him the most abusive language, mixed with imprecations too horrid to be repeated! It is worthy of remark, that this unhappy being soon after died in a miserable state, oppressed with poverty, and emaciated with disease.

*THE following affecting intelligence for Youth, is further illustrative of the baneful consequences of a disregard to the culture and formation of early habits of virtue and industry.*

IT is impossible for any subject to be more deserving of the serious consideration of young persons, than that alarming depravity which has lately manifested itself among persons of their class, and which called forth the serious determination I am about to state.

In consequence of the prevalence of crimes of the deepest die among children, from ten to eighteen years of age, the Prince Regent had been advised, that it was necessary to make a dreadful example of some of them; accordingly the Recorder was instructed to declare, at the last Middlesex Sessions, "that it was his Royal Highness's full intention to punish, to the extent of the rigour of the law, any persons, however young, who should be convicted of capital crimes at the next Sessions."

Unhappily, when the Sessions opened, it was found, that there were upwards of *fifty* youths in Newgate charged with different crimes, and many of them of the most capital kind.

Amongst these one young man, named Charles Huske Allen, aged 16 years, was convicted of robbing the Post-Office of money contained in letters entrusted to his care; several indictments were against him, and he is now under sentence of death for this crime.

Another young man named Jones, was convicted of breaking into a house and robbing it, he was convicted upon the evidence of an accomplice, who there-

by saved himself from trial; which may serve to shew this truth, that there is no just ground to depend on the fidelity of an accomplice in crime.

Many of those who were tried were convicted, and their situations were awfully alarming.

The public execution of such juvenile offenders is justified upon this principle, that if they are of age to contrive, devise, and secretly to perpetrate crimes of such magnitude, they are old enough to suffer the penalties of the law for the same.

Offences like those above described are not accidental, nor such as good children could commit under momentary temptation; they are the effects of most vicious habits of thinking and acting, brought on by long indulged falsehood, idleness, and extravagance; but most of all, by licentious intercourse with the very worst of characters, watching for those who will listen to their voice and be lured by them into their snares.

Death, at all times terrific, presents himself with ten-fold horrors in the case of a lad of unripe years turned off at the place of public execution, for some heinous offence against society.

Let the serious and reflecting youth, therefore, pause a moment over the solemn thought of the dreadful hereafter with respect to these delinquents; and while he bends the knee in thankful acknowledgements [to that God who causes him to differ, let him offer his ardent prayers that God will display towards them that mercy which the welfare of society will not allow of their experiencing from man.

And if this letter should fall into the hands of any of those wretched parents who train up their children, not in the way in which they ought to go, but in lies and other vices, and who thus devote their children,

by evil example and precepts, first to the commission of crimes, and then to the suffering of punishments; let them contemplate with agony and horror the fate of those sufferers, and view in it the impending fate of their own wicked offspring, whose unhappiness it is that they have been born of such wicked and unfeeling parents. *November, 1814.*

### THE BOY OF DUNDEE.

*The following narrative strikingly illustrates the beneficial consequences arising from a dilligent attention to that nurture and admonition of the youthful mind which the Scriptures enjoin.*

A LADY, in the neighbourhood of Dundee, going to visit a poor woman in the town, was directed, by mistake, to the lodging of another person, and knocking at the door, was desired, in a low female voice, to come in.

On going into the room, she found a poor helpless woman on a bed, who seemed to be in a miserable situation, in consequence of a paralytic stroke which she had had five years before.

Her friendly visitor pitying her condition, was surprised to hear her say, that she thought herself one of the happiest of mortals; and on desiring an explanation, the poor woman related the following particulars.

In the younger part of life she was left a widow, with an only son; who, when she had the stroke, was

twelve years of age. Till that time, by spinning and other work, she had been enabled to maintain herself and her child; and to pay a trifle for his education. Since that trying dispensation of Providence, confined to her bed, and deprived of the use of her limbs, she had been unable to do any thing for herself; and had no money to pay another. Her son, at that early age, trusting to the Divine blessing, took the noble resolution, by the labour of his own hands, to supply the wants of his afflicted parent. A female neighbour sometimes called in to do little kind services for her; but her chief comfort, and her support, arose from the affection and unceasing attention of her son. He procured such work as his years would admit, in the Osnaburg manufactory at Dundee. Every morning, after cleaning the room in which they dwelt, getting ready their breakfast, and making his mother as comfortable as he could till his return, he left her, with a smiling countenance, to attend the labours of the loom; and returned in the evening with his well-earned pittance, to enjoy a cheerful meal with his beloved parent. And thus had they lived, for the space of five years.

But this is not all: the mother could not read; the son, by her kindness, had obtained that advantage. He had read the Holy Scriptures; and he knew the truth as it is in Jesus. In the midst of poverty and distress, he had found great riches; and he experienced that the ways of religion are "ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace!" Reflecting, therefore, on the many hours he was under the necessity of leaving his mother, alone and unemployed; and desirous that she also should share in the blessings which he enjoyed from his religious knowledge; he resolved to teach her to read; and, in due time, accom-

plished the pleasing task ; affording her, by this means, a comfort and delight, which, she confessed, had made her one of the happiest of women. She added, that during her son's absence, she loved to meditate on the holy volume, whose divine truths had filled her soul with humble hope and joy ; and afforded her that peace, which the world can neither give, nor take away ! and that it was unspeakably pleasing to her, to think she owed all this, by the blessing of Providence, to her beloved son.

Parents have a natural claim on their offspring for support ; and relieving aged parents, when bodily strength decays, infirmities and wants increase, is not only an act of mercy, but also an act of justice, an imperious duty,—a repaying in kind, what *they* did for their children in their tender helpless years, and to “ *withold from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it,*” and “ *shut up our bowels of compassion when we see them in need,*” argues an extreme hardness of heart. “ *How dwelleth the love of God in such a one? Can the merciless hope for mercy, who will shew no mercy!*”

FINIS.